



Department  
for Education

# Literacy and numeracy qualification requirements for level 3 Early Years Educator staff

**Government consultation**

**Launch date 5 November 2016**

**Respond by 28 November 2016**

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## Foreword



This Government is committed to promoting social mobility, and we know early years education and childcare have an important role to play in this. As the Minister for Early Years, and a former small business owner myself, I am very aware of just how vital the role of the early years workforce is in this. The workforce matters because it can make up over 70% of a

childcare provider's costs<sup>1</sup>, and most importantly because staff are the greatest resource for any business or organisation. The evidence is clear that a high quality workforce has a significant impact on the quality of provision and outcomes for children. I want early years settings and training providers to be able to recruit people who have a passion for working with children and have the right skills and knowledge to offer high quality early education and childcare. I also want staff to hold the qualifications necessary to support their own progression and development and enable them to have a fulfilling career in the sector.

With 86% of settings rated good or outstanding by Ofsted, the quality of the early years sector has continued to increase<sup>2</sup>. I support the approach that has been taken to raise the quality and status of the workforce over recent years, but like my predecessor Sam Gyimah MP, I have heard strong messages from the sector that we must look again at the GCSE requirement for level 3 Early Years Educator staff if we want to attract and retain high quality staff with the potential to progress.

There is no doubt that strong numeracy and literacy skills are essential for those working with young children at a critical time in their development. It is vital that staff have an understanding of child development including how children acquire language and numeracy. It is also essential that they model good language, communication and mathematical and problem solving skills, and have the appropriate level of ability and confidence in their skills to communicate with a wide range of audiences such as parents, health workers, local authority staff, and other professionals. That is why through this consultation I want to hear your views on the numeracy and literacy knowledge and skills required to enable staff to perform their roles effectively.

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<sup>1</sup> Review of childcare costs, November 2015 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-childcare-costs>

<sup>2</sup> The proportion of providers on the Early Years Register judged to be good or outstanding has increased to 86% in March 2016 compared to 85% in the previous period. This represents a four percentage point increase on the position a year ago and a 12 percentage point increase on the position at the start of the cycle on 31 August 2012.

The Government is increasingly working with employers to develop qualifications that are directly relevant to job roles. I support this approach but I am also mindful of the need to help staff gain the transferable skills and qualifications that enable them to progress their careers more broadly. I therefore invite respondents to also consider how we could achieve the right balance in terms of setting qualification requirements that fulfil both aims.

I welcome views from a broad range of stakeholders on the questions posed in this consultation and I look forward to considering them. I plan to respond to this consultation as part of the forthcoming workforce strategy, which will also set out the Government's wider vision for the early years workforce and a plan for how that will be achieved.

**CAROLINE DINENAGE MP**

**Parliamentary under Secretary of State for Women, Equalities and Early Years**

## Who this is for

- Early years sector
- Managers of nurseries and other pre-school settings
- Teachers and early years practitioners
- Training providers
- Local authorities
- Academics
- Employers

## Issue date

The consultation was issued on 5 November 2016.

## Enquiries

If your enquiry is related to the policy content of the consultation you can contact the team by email at [level3.consultation@education.gov.uk](mailto:level3.consultation@education.gov.uk)

If your enquiry is related to the DfE e-consultation website or the consultation process in general, you can contact the DfE Ministerial and Public Communications Division by email: [Consultations.Coordinator@education.gov.uk](mailto:Consultations.Coordinator@education.gov.uk) or by telephone: 0370 000 2288 or via the [DfE Contact us page](#).

## Additional copies

Additional copies are available electronically and can be downloaded from [GOV.UK DfE consultations](#).

## The response

The results of the consultation and the Department's response will be [published on GOV.UK](#) in winter 2016/17.

## About this consultation

We are seeking views on the level 2 literacy and numeracy qualification requirements for staff with a level 3 Early Years Educator qualification.

This consultation is an opportunity to better understand what knowledge, skills and appropriate qualifications in mathematics and English are required to perform an effective level 3 role.

It also seeks to consider what literacy and numeracy qualification requirements can put level 3 staff in the best position to progress in their careers.

## Respond online

To help us analyse the responses please use the online system wherever possible. Visit [www.education.gov.uk/consultations](http://www.education.gov.uk/consultations) to submit your response.

## Other ways to respond

If for exceptional reasons, you are unable to use the online system, for example because you use specialist accessibility software that is not compatible with the system, you may download a word document version of the form and email it or post it.

### By email

[level3.consultation@education.gov.uk](mailto:level3.consultation@education.gov.uk)

### By post

Level 3 consultation  
Early years workforce and quality  
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Sanctuary Buildings  
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## Deadline

The consultation closes on 28 November 2016.

# Background

## Level 3 qualification requirements

1. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework sets out the standards that schools and childcare providers must meet for the learning, development and care of children under the age of 5. Section 3 of the framework sets out the welfare and safeguarding requirements including staff:child ratios and the qualifications that staff must hold to operate within ratios. The welfare and safeguarding requirements underpin the welfare requirements set out in primary legislation through the Childcare Act 2006. The EYFS can be accessed [here](#).
2. The EYFS requires staff that hold an Early Years Educator qualification to also hold GCSE grade C or above in English and mathematics to count towards level 3 ratios. The requirement for staff to hold an Early Years Educator and GCSEs came into force on 1 September 2014 and was not applied retrospectively. This means that staff who achieved their 'full and relevant' level 3 qualification before 1 September 2014 do not need to hold GCSEs to count towards level 3 ratios. This rule applies even where a member of staff with a 'full and relevant' qualification moves employer. Guidance on the qualification requirements set out in the EYFS can be found in the early years [qualifications list](#).
3. The GCSE requirement was introduced following Professor Cathy Nutbrown's independent review of early years qualifications in 2012. Professor Nutbrown's report, [Foundations for Quality](#), highlighted the importance of early years staff having appropriate numeracy and literacy knowledge and skills to help them support the early learning of young children and enable them to progress to further study. The recommendation on numeracy and literacy was that level 2 English and mathematics should be entry requirements to level 3 early education and childcare courses.
4. The Government's response to the Nutbrown review recommendation was to introduce a requirement for staff to hold GCSEs. The GCSE requirement was introduced over a period of two years to allow learners, training providers and employers to plan and adjust. During the first year of implementation the EYFS required staff had to hold the relevant GCSEs on entry to training. However, following concerns raised by the sector about the inflexibility of the GCSE assessment timetable, a decision was taken to apply the requirement on entry to work only. This approach allows greater flexibility for learners as they are able to study for their GCSEs alongside their childcare training.
5. The Government understands that in general the sector welcomes the *ambition* of the GCSE requirement. In particular, the transferable skills and qualifications

acquired from GCSEs and the career progression it encourages. The introduction of this requirement also demonstrated our commitment to the importance of upskilling the workforce at level 3. We therefore recognise that it is important, through this consultation, for Government to hear the breadth of views on what constitutes the right literacy and numeracy skills and knowledge for level 3 staff.

## **Impact of the GCSE requirement**

6. The GCSE requirement came into force in September 2014. As the average length of an Early Years Educator course is 18 months, newly qualified staff would be expected to join the workforce from summer 2016. Those learners who undertook an apprenticeship route will already hold their GCSEs and be work ready. Learners who achieved their Early Years Educator through a standalone training course may not yet have achieved the necessary GCSEs.
7. During stakeholder discussions on the workforce strategy, some employers told us that they are experiencing difficulty recruiting level 3 staff because there are too few candidates with the appropriate GCSEs. Given the GCSE requirement was not applied retrospectively but only to new staff, this indicates that there may be a high turnover of staff at level 3 and that employers may be reliant on newly qualified staff each academic year to fill roles. Employers have also told us that recruiting and retaining level 2 staff has become more challenging because the GCSE requirement is discouraging people from entering the sector and preventing those already working in settings from progressing.
8. National data on the impact of the GCSE requirement is currently inconclusive. However communications from employers and training providers indicate that the requirement is acting as a barrier to recruiting and retaining staff. Although employers engaged in discussions about the workforce strategy have acknowledged that the factors influencing recruitment and retention are complex and not solely related to qualification requirements, many have said that revision of the GCSE requirement could have a positive impact on recruitment into the workforce.



## Proposals for consultation

9. On 1 July, the previous Childcare Minister, Sam Gyimah MP, confirmed that Government would revisit the GCSE requirement. The Government has already carried out informal consultation as part of stakeholder engagement on the early years workforce strategy. However, the qualification requirements are welfare requirements for the purposes of the Childcare Act 2006, and amending them engages a statutory obligation on the Secretary of State to consult Her Majesty's Chief Inspector and any other persons she considers appropriate.
10. This consultation is an opportunity to better understand the potential impact of the current GCSE requirement on the early years workforce and quality of provision. It aims to inform a Government decision on how the requirement could be adjusted to ensure that people with the knowledge, skills and appropriate qualifications to perform a level 3 role can enter the sector, whilst also putting them in the best position from which to progress through their careers.
11. The responses received to this consultation will inform the decision whether to adjust the current GCSE requirement, which could include broadening the requirement to hold level 2 qualifications in English and mathematics including, but not exclusive to, GCSEs. This approach would be consistent with the development of new apprenticeship standards, which commonly require apprentices working towards a level 3 apprenticeship or above to have achieved level 2 qualifications in English and mathematics prior to taking their end point assessment and becoming fully competent.

## Required knowledge and skills

12. The Government is committed to supporting the development of a high quality early years workforce. To achieve this it is important that the qualifications and regulatory requirements in the early years sector reflect the knowledge and skills that level 3 staff need to perform in the role of early years practitioner. This is in line with government's wider focus on the development of sector led occupational standards and qualifications through the [Sainsbury review](#) and apprenticeship programme, and the involvement of employers on an on-going basis to ensure that standards set for apprenticeships and technical routes are up to date and relevant to industry practices.
13. In particular, this consultation is looking to identify what level 2 English and mathematics qualification requirements would best ensure that staff have developed the following understanding, skills and knowledge by the time they join the workforce at level 3, such as:

- a) an understanding of child development including how children acquire language and numeracy;
- b) an ability to model good language, communication and numeracy skills, and show a passion for them, to the children they work with;
- c) the appropriate level of ability and confidence in their literacy and numeracy skills to communicate with a wide range of audiences from parents to professional services effectively.

**Q1 What English knowledge and skills do staff need to perform at level 3 Early Years Educator level?**

- A range of speaking and listening skills to develop relationships with children, parents and other professionals
- Being able to communicate effectively, verbally and in writing, with parents and other professionals
- Being able to write meaningful documentation with good spelling and grammar
- Being able to comprehend written material
- Confidence in understanding the literacy requirements in the EYFS and how to impart them to young learners (creating and thinking critically, listening and attention, understanding, speaking, reading and writing)
- An appreciation of the importance of reading in supporting own development and that of young children
- An understanding of how to experiment with and use language creatively
- Ability to select/adapt speech/writing to different situations and audiences
- Independent thinking and working
- Other, please explain

**Q2 What mathematical knowledge and skills do staff need to perform at level 3 Early Years Educator level?**

- Confidence in understanding mathematical terms and concepts relevant to the job role and how to apply them in an early years setting e.g. simple concepts such as addition, subtraction and percentages and skills required to manage a budget
- Ability to present numerical information appropriately and to interpret numerical information e.g. review performance data or budget information
- Confidence in understanding the numeracy requirements in the EYFS and how to impart them to young learners (numbers, space shape and measures)
- Ability to identify opportunities for children to develop and improve their skills in counting, understanding and using numbers, calculating simple addition and subtraction problems; and to describe shapes, spaces, and measures

- Understanding how to use everyday mathematical vocabulary to talk about size, weight, capacity, position, distance, time and money to compare quantities and objects and to solve problems, using mathematical language to describe them
- The ability to apply mathematical knowledge successfully to different contexts including every day and real world situations
- Independent thinking and working
- Developed problem solving skills
- Other, please explain

## Barriers to recruitment

14. Over the past year many in the early years sector have raised concerns that they are facing increasing difficulties in recruiting and retaining able staff.

**Q3 In the last two years, have you experienced difficulty in recruiting people to work in your setting/attend your training course?**

- No difficulties in recruiting
- Yes, some difficulties but with limited impact on my organisation
- Yes, significant difficulties which have impacted my organisation
- Other, please explain

**Q4 If you experienced difficulties with recruitment, what was the nature of the main difficulty you experienced in recruiting people to work in your setting/attend your training course?**

- Not enough applicants applying for job roles
- Applicants who applied did not have relevant childcare qualification
- Applicants who applied did not have required GCSEs
- Applicants who applied or were interviewed did not have suitable knowledge or skills
- Other, please explain

**Q5 If you experienced difficulties with recruitment please provide relevant information or evidence on how this has impacted on your setting/training organisation.**

**Q6 In 2014 we introduced the requirement for level 3 staff to hold GCSEs in English and mathematics at grade C or above. Has this had an impact on recruiting people to work in your setting/attend your training course?**

- No impact
- Yes, it has led to increasing quality in applicants
- Yes, it has reduced the number of applicants.

- Yes, my organisation has had to reject applicants who we thought were otherwise suitable.
- Other, please explain

**Q7 Which of the following has your organisation experienced over the last year?**

- Delays in recruiting an applicant due to the GCSE assessment timetable
- Rejecting an otherwise suitable applicant because they did not have English GCSE grade C
- Rejecting an otherwise suitable applicant because they did not have mathematics GCSE grade C
- Additional costs in preparing and entering people for GCSE exams
- Other, please explain

## **Staff development**

15. The Government wants to ensure support is in place for those already working in the early years sector to improve their skills and progress their careers. In particular we are interested to understand what would encourage level 2 staff currently in the sector to progress to level 3. Any change to qualification requirements will need to ensure staff are put in the best position to progress in their careers in the future. This will require the qualification gained to be transferrable and recognised both within and outside of the sector. The forthcoming workforce strategy will focus more broadly on how to support workforce development and progression.

**Q8 What numeracy and literacy qualification requirements at level 3 would encourage level 2 staff who are already in the sector to progress to level 3?**

- The qualifications gained to be transferrable both within and outside of the sector
- Clear progression from level 2 requirements to level 3
- Qualification that is seen as development and that clearly relates to, and supports, the level 3 practitioner role
- Other, please explain

**Q9 What support can be put in place for those already in the sector to progress from level 2 to level 3?**

- A qualification that does not require a significant time commitment alongside work
- A qualification that builds on the experience already gained by a level 2 practitioner

- Multiple exam points during the year, allowing resits to take place
- Other, please explain

## Options for level 2 literacy and numeracy qualification requirements

16. Through informal consultation with stakeholders as part of the workforce strategy, the early years sector have advocated level 2 literacy and numeracy Functional Skills qualifications as an acceptable alternative to GCSEs for the level 3 Early Years Educator qualification requirement.
17. Since the Nutbrown review, Ofqual has undertaken a review of the Functional Skills qualification. As a result, awarding organisations are now making changes in four key areas of Functional Skills qualifications: improving the quality of assessment materials; reducing the risk of malpractice and maladministration; strengthening standard setting procedures; and evaluating better how far qualifications are meeting user needs.
18. This consultation is an opportunity to ensure any change supports the long term aim of a high quality workforce, alongside maximising options for staff progression and development.
19. Options for other level 2 qualifications could include:
  - a) Introducing a requirement for staff to hold a level 2 qualification in English and mathematics as an entry to work requirement, this would mean trainees could study for their level 2 qualification either before or alongside their level 3 Early Years Educator training.
  - b) Introducing a requirement for staff to hold a level 2 qualification in English and mathematics as an entry to training requirement so that staff must hold these before beginning their Early Years Educator training.
  - c) Allowing Functional Skills qualifications for an interim period until the number of school leavers gaining GCSEs in English and mathematics increases.
  - d) Developing a bespoke qualification focussed specifically on effective practice to engage young children in literacy and numeracy learning, instead of or on top of, a pre-existing level 2 numeracy or literacy qualification. This would mean employers could develop a qualification that delivered the right knowledge and skills for the job role, but could mean that staff would hold a qualification that was not widely recognised outside the sector.

**Q10 What literacy qualification requirements at level 2 do you think are most appropriate for level 3 staff?**

- GCSE grade C or above in English
- Functional Skills English level 2
- No suitable qualification currently exists, developing a bespoke qualification on effective practice to engage young children in literacy learning would be most appropriate for this role
- Other, please explain

**Q11 What numeracy qualification requirements at level 2 do you think are most appropriate for level 3 staff?**

- GCSE grade C or above in mathematics
- Functional Skills mathematics level 2
- No suitable qualification currently exists, developing a bespoke qualification on effective practice to engage young children in numeracy learning would be most appropriate for this role
- Other, please explain

**Q12 At what stage should the relevant literacy and numeracy qualifications be gained?**

- On entry to early years training
- On entry to work in an early years setting
- Other e.g. after a a post qualifying year while in paid employment



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